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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 001037

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [YM](#) [DOMESTIC POLITICS](#)

SUBJECT: AL-HOUTHI LEADERS FLEE YEMEN, REBELLION NEAR END
BUT VIOLENCE CONTINUES

REF: A. SANAA 949

[B.](#) SANAA 426

Classified By: DCM Nabeel Khoury for reasons 1.4 b and d.

[¶11.](#) (C) Summary. The level of conflict between government and rebel forces in the Sa'ada region seems to be decreasing, but clashes continue in isolated areas. The leaders of the uprising are rumored to have fled the country, perhaps under a negotiated agreement. There is considerable risk that violence may again flare up, as tribes become involved in the conflict due to charges of harsh army tactics and widespread resentment among the population. End summary.

Leadership on the Lamb

[¶12.](#) (C) Clashes between al-Houthi rebels and government forces are diminishing in Sa'ada, but fighting continues in the regions of al-Shafa'a, Razamat, and Beni Ma'ad. There is continued unrest in Sa'ada city, as well, where a March 23 attack killed three security officials in the al-Salaam quarter. According to a number of media sources, rebel leaders Badr Eddin al-Houthi and Abdullah Ayedh al-Razami have fled Yemen for either Saudi Arabia or Bahrain. (Note: These reports are unconfirmed and there are separate rumors that at least some of the leadership is hiding in the al-Jawf region of Yemen. End note). According to Abd al-Majid al-Fahd, a democracy activist and Sa'ada native, the government used a heavy hand to crush the uprising and actual casualty numbers are closer to 700 than the official count of approximately 300 (ref A). After visiting the region, al-Fahd said that because of severe ROYG tactics, Sa'ada residents overwhelmingly support the rebels, although most remain unwilling to take up arms at this time. Journalist Hamoud Munasser confirmed this impression, saying mass arrests in Sa'ada and its environs have also inflamed local sentiment against the ROYG.

[¶13.](#) (C) Al-Fahd contended that the leaders' departure was likely the result of mediation efforts by Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar, leader of the region's Hashid tribal confederation and head of the opposition Islah party. The ROYG initially excluded Al-Ahmar from policy issues related to Sa'ada, and many Islah members complained of being left out and uninformed of events during the conflict. As the conflict threatened to widen, however, it appears the Sheikh was recruited to negotiate its end. Al-Fahd noted that combatants from al-Shafa'a and Razamat come from segments of the Wa'ilah tribe that follow the Zaydi Shi'a sect (while other parts of Wa'ilah are Saudi influenced Salafis). In Beni Ma'ad, however, government forces were fighting the entire Sahara tribe. Munasser confirmed this news with reports that army reinforcements are now being deployed to the Beni Ma'ad region. In Yemen's culture of tribal revenge, the involvement of tribes in the fighting does not bode well for a decisive end to the conflict. News of a grenade attack March 25 outside the Ministry of Finance building in Sanaa suggests that while the major offensive may be over, unconventional attacks along the lines seen over the past two weeks may continue.

Rebellion "Going Tribal?"

[¶14.](#) (C) According to Al-Fahd, this round of fighting in Sa'ada marks a turning point for President Saleh. It is the first time in his presidency that the ROYG has launched a full offensive against an entire tribe (the Sahara). Previously, the al-Houthi rebellion was characterized as a military operation against religious zealots. Official statements from Iran and from Ayatollah al-Sistani in Iraq condemned ROYG military operations as anti-Shi'a. Al-Fahd, however, believes the ROYG security forces moved "quickly and brutally" in Sa'ada, to keep down contentious tribal groups in al-Jawf that were threatening to join al-Houthi en masse.

[¶15.](#) (C) Comment: Information on what is going on in Sa'ada has been hard to come by throughout this second al-Houthi rebellion. ROYG Officials who are usually open with embooffs claim to be in the dark, travel to the region is very restricted and the media is banned from the area. Al-Fahd is one of our few contacts that has been both in the area

recently, and is willing to talk about it. As a democracy advocate, however, his interests do not lie with the regime and he may have exaggerated the severity of the conflict. If, as he contends, the ROYG's response to the uprising has led to growing tensions between northern tribes and the ROYG, the conflict could take on new dimensions in the future. End comment.

Krajeski